



State of Tennessee
Department of State
Tennessee State Library and Archives
403 Seventh Avenue North
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**BOARD OF EXAMINERS IN WATCHMAKING
RECORDS
1955-1959**

RECORD GROUP 66

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SCOPE AND CONTENT

The Board of Examiners in Watchmaking was created by the Tennessee General Assembly in 1955 (TCA 1955, Chapter 101, Section 62-1401), to regulate the repairing of watches in the state in the best interests of both consumers and repairmen. (The term “watchmaker” actually refers to repairers rather than manufacturers of watches in this context). Although the legislation was in keeping with the general spirit of consumer protection which was gaining influence throughout the country, protection of the consumer in such a minor area of economic life was regarded as excessive. On March 12, 1959, the state Supreme Court declared the regulation of watchmaking unconstitutional, and the Board thus ceased to exist. During its short life, it never succeeded in defining its authority clearly, nor apparently did it ever enjoy general support among watchmakers, although it had been actively sought and continued to be enthusiastically supported by some of them. Its authority was eroded both actively, by legal challenges, and passively, by watch repairmen who, through either ignorance or contempt, failed to register as the law required. An interesting comparison is possible between the Board of Examiners in Watchmaking and the Tennessee Real Estate Commission (Record Group 56), another regulatory board but one which overcame the obstacles which defeated the Watchmaking Board.

The records preserved here include files on watchmakers actually registered under the law (although they give no indication what percentage of the state’s watchmakers were ever registered); correspondence with state Vocational Rehabilitation counselors; bills, ledgers, payrolls and other records of operating expenses; budget data, and report.

The applications filed by watchmakers seeking registration provide such information as the age, sex, race and educational level of the regulated group. Correspondence between the watchmakers and the Board reveals problems that arose in the administration of the law; the letters also suggest causes of the agency’s eventual demise. The insensitivity of the Executive Secretary to the problems the watchmakers, many of them poor, elderly and poorly educated, gave the watchmakers little reason to support the Board, while the continuing confusion over the provisions regarding advertising by watchmakers resulted in some watchmakers openly advertising their prices, while others, aware of the intent of the law, complained in vain to the Board. The diminution of the Board’s authority is documented by the renewal receipts, showing fewer renewals each year.

Cooperation between the Board of Examiners in Watchmaking and the state Vocational Rehabilitation program is documented in extensive correspondence and expense forms, demonstrating efforts by the state to funnel handicapped citizens into the trade of watchmaking.

Records of office operating expenses, indicating the types and amounts of different types of expenditures, are reasonably complete for the brief life-span of the Board. Less complete are the budget data-work programs and proposals-detailing the process by which the Board requested and received its operating funds. The personnel files include mainly correspondence between the Nashville office and the Board of Directors, who played a large role in the Board's operations in their home communities. There are no records (other than financial) specifically relating to the paid employees.

The two reports included offer a systematic description of the Board's operations and expenditures on an annual basis.

Unfortunately, while the material preserved here reveal a great deal about the Board's operations, the indicated very little about its origins or its fate. There is nothing specifically on the creation of the Board (rationale, lobbying, etc.) and little more on its demise. To remedy this latter vacuum, two sets of documents have been copied from other sources and are included here as Series 8. The copies of correspondence with the Attorney General's office are mostly routine in nature, dealing with interpretations and specific regulations, but they do include some information about the case which eventually brought the Supreme Court decision. And from the Tennessee Reports, an account of the case itself, Livesay v. the Board of Examiners in Watchmaking has been copied.

Finally, the gubernatorial papers of Frank G. Clement include voluminous correspondence regarding the Board. These materials provide significant insights into the reasons for the Board's failure, revealing it to have been riven by dissent from its very beginning. Any student of the Board's operations should also consult these records, listed in the index of the Clement papers.

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